

NEWS RELEASE

*OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS*

*RONALD J. TENPAS
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY*

Nine Executive Drive, Fairview Heights, Illinois 62208, Telephone (618) 628-3700

For Immediate Release

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Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today that on September 20, 2004, **DAVID J. RENNICKE**, age 32, of 5427 Centreville, Illinois, and his wife, **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE a/k/a CRYSTAL D. DEWALT**, age 38, also of 5427 Gay Avenue, each received five year sentences following their convictions for conspiring to defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs ("the VA") and with making false statements to the VA and the Social Security Administration.

DAVID J. RENNICKE and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** were found guilty on June 23, 2004, by a jury sitting in East St. Louis following a four day trial. They were also ordered to pay the government \$185,114.59 in restitution.

The evidence adduced at trial revealed that after a brief period of service in the Navy, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** applied for disability compensation from the VA for a back injury. The VA began awarding **DAVID J. RENNICKE** benefits based upon a finding of 20% disability. Beginning in September, 1999, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** began falsely representing to VA physicians and other personnel that **DAVID J. RENNICKE** was unable to walk, wheelchair bound and dependent upon **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** to assist him in his personal care. As a result, the VA overpaid **DAVID J. RENNICKE** \$118,000 in disability benefits and gave him \$8,000 for the purchase of a vehicle to which he was not entitled. The VA sustained further monetary losses in providing **DAVID J. RENNICKE** with unnecessary prosthetic equipment, to include a \$13,000 wheelchair lift. **DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** attempted to obtain a \$48,000 home modification grant from the VA, but they were not successful due to the unfeasibility of modifying their home, which was in a state of disrepair. Videotaped surveillance in April, 2003 captured **DAVID J. RENNICKE** walking, lifting, bending, and pushing a loaded wheelbarrow in his yard.

In 1999, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** also falsely and fraudulently informed the Social Security Administration that he was paralyzed from the waist down, that he had lost the use of the right side of his body, and that he was dependent upon his wife for his personal care. **DAVID J. RENNICKE'S**

attempt to collect disability benefits from the Social Security Administration failed.

Similarly, in 1999, **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** falsely and fraudulently informed the Social Security Administration that she could not walk, was wheelchair bound, and was dependent upon her husband for her personal care. Following a March, 2000 hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** began receiving \$500 per month in Social Security Disability benefits, retroactive to 1997. In December, 2002 **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** also falsely and fraudulently informed the Social Security Administration that she and **DAVID J. RENNICKE** had separated, thereby meeting the financial need requirements to qualify for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

DAVID J. RENNICKE and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** have been in custody since June 23, 2004.

Following release from imprisonment, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** will serve three year terms of supervised release. During their terms of supervision, they will not be permitted to make additional applications for public benefits without first notifying their probation officers.

The charges were a result of an investigation started by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, Criminal Investigations Division in 2001 after alert VA employees became suspicious of **DAVID J. RENNICKE**. The Social Security offenses were discovered during the course of the investigation, and a joint investigation with the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations started. The Centreville Police Department also assisted in the investigation.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Suzanne M. Garrison.